ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present invention provides an image coding method that efficiently compresses an image read through an optical system and significantly improves the quality of reproduced images.

Image area separation section 2001 carries out image area decision in tile (macro block) units to separate the image into photographic image tiles and character image tiles. Then, layer separation section 2003 performs layer separation pixel by pixel to separate each pixel into pixels belonging to a background and pixels belonging to a foreground. Approximation processors 2008 and 2009 alleviate an increase of entropy due to layer separation through approximation processing and carry out JPEG-like processing on photographic images. The images are then subjected to coding with variable-length codes such as arithmetic codes. The coding rate is subjected to feedback control as appropriate taking into account the performance of the apparatus.